



**MONTANA  
FARM BUREAU  
FEDERATION**

502 S. 19<sup>th</sup> Ave. Ste 104  
Bozeman, MT 59718

October 2, 2013

State-Tribal Relations Committee  
Legislative Services Division  
PO Box 201706  
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Members of the State-Tribal Relations Committee and other interested stakeholders:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to discuss the bison issue with you. As Montana's largest general agriculture organization, the Montana Farm Bureau Federation has a vested interest in the issue. We represent farmers and ranchers from every county in the state. The issue of wild, free roaming bison has been a hot topic of discussion since 2009, with the subject of Yellowstone National Park bison dating back much longer and it continues to be of great concern to our members today. Therefore, we very much appreciate the chance to discuss this important issue with you and work toward a solution.

MFBF is extremely interested in resolving this issue. For the past two Legislative Sessions, the battle over what to do about bison in Montana has been waged and unfortunately, very little has been done because almost all the bills which have passed the Legislature have been vetoed. It is clearly an issue that is not going away any time soon so something has to be done.

As farmers and ranchers, the protection of private property, animal health, and human health and safety are of utmost importance. Our very livelihoods, and consequently our families, are put in jeopardy when any of these things are threatened. When rumors of the potential establishment of wild, free roaming bison started circulating our members established a policy that says "We oppose the establishment of wild or free roaming bison." Our position is simple and clear for the following reasons. Today wild bison only exist in Yellowstone National Park. Farmers and ranchers now provide habitat to many types of wildlife including deer, elk, antelope and so on. Adding another large ungulate to the landscape adds a burden to farms and ranches that has never existed in the past. Furthermore, a bison is much a different animal than the other types of wildlife we now accommodate on our property. They are a large animal, with a very real potential do to serious property damage including destroying crops, fences, water tanks, hay stacks, and other essential inputs needed to

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our crops and care for our livestock. There are also risks to animal health with respect for the potential for disease transmission.

There are several essential points which must be added to fully illustrate our position on this issue. First of all, MFBF is not opposed to people owning bison. We have members who raise bison as part of their farming and ranching operations and realize there are a good number of domestic bison herds in the state. In no way do we wish to prevent a person from owning a buffalo. We do however believe that all bison outside of Yellowstone National Park (YNP) or the National Bison Range should continue to be classified as livestock and regulated by the Montana Department of Livestock, subject to the same health standards as other types of domestic livestock. MFBF does not believe support the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) taking over such management, nor do we not support FWP transferring bison from the Bison Quarantine Area outside of YNP to public or private interests. With regard to YNP bison, we support keeping them inside the Park according to the Interagency Bison Management Plan Memorandum of Understanding, managing population numbers, and working towards the eradication of disease in the herd.

Furthermore, our farmer and rancher members are extremely concerned about livestock grazing leases on state lands, BLM, US Forest Service, or National Monuments being converted to wild bison leases. We believe these leases must continue to be maintained as grazing leases for livestock. Wild animals must not be allowed to take priority over livestock and drive farmers and ranchers off land which was originally designated to either generate revenue for the school trust through agriculture or natural resource leases (state lands) or for multiple uses which do include grazing (federal lands).

As you know, agriculture is the number one industry in Montana, contributing over \$3.5 billion to the economy in 2011, according to the Montana Ag Statistics Service. There are more than 29,000 farms in this state. If wild, free roaming bison are established on the landscape, it will significantly affect these farmers and ranchers, consequently harming the state's economy and dealing a devastating blow to small communities, towns and even schools as farmers and ranchers are put in financial jeopardy or are even driven off the landscape.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be a part of the discussion on this issue. We very much appreciate your willingness to sit down and start a conversation and look forward to working with you toward a solution.

Sincerely,  
Nicole Rolf  
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